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I and all Extra Class hams would have been cheated." ...**Salvatore/NX2R, Closter, NJ**

"Your ideas to simplify the licensing structure make a lot of sense. Press onward with them."
...**Bruce/KA8TIO, Dodge City, KS (General Class and an M.D.)**

"It is past time for changes. I would go even as far as to say that two classes of license would be better. When I came into ham radio in Nov. 1955 while in high school at Macon, GA, I started with Novice and six months later was General with all privileges. Later I passed the re-added Advanced which was no license incentive. It was just plain recouping a loss of what was already earned. I want your group to do all it can to bring things up to date..." ...**Hugh/K4GVG, Dry Branch, GA. OOTC and QCWA.**

For the record, we have received about 150 response so far with 75% in favor of some form of restructuring the Amateur Service and simplifying licensing. And we are still VERY MUCH interested in your views! Please send them to us in any form you can - but preferably a letter with arguments - to: The W5YI Group, P.O. Box 565101, Dallas, Texas 75356. Until next month. de Fred/W5YI

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**WASHINGTON READOUT
HAPPENINGS FROM THE WORLD OF AMATEUR RADIO**

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RESTRUCTURING THE AMATEUR SERVICE

This is our third (and last) episode on the possible need to simplify Amateur Radio licensing. Several months have passed since we first wrote about the matter and a carton-full of responses have poured in from readers. They came from everywhere ...by "snail" mail, electronic mail, FAX, telephone, packet ...even from wireline digital services like CompuServe, Internet and Prodigy. For those of you who did not see the original article, let us recap.

We floated an idea which would simplify and restructure the ham bands in our November column. Essentially we suggested combining the Novice and Technician Classes into a "Basic" Class, renaming the General Class to "Intermediate" and combining the Advanced and Extra Class into an "Expert" Class. This would reduce the current six classes (Novice, Technician, Tech Plus, General, Advanced and Amateur Extra) to three.

Each of the three classes would require passing a 50 question multiple choice written examination on rules, operating procedures and electronic theory. The "Basic" Class would be "no code", with 5 and 13 words-per-minute telegraphy knowledge being required for the "Intermediate" and "Expert" Class. No presently licensed amateur would lose any current privileges; they would be indefinitely "grandfathered".

The "Basic" class would have all privileges above 30 MHz, the General Class would maintain current privileges ...with the Expert obtaining all available amateur privileges. Current Novices and Tech Plus (with 5 wpm code credit) would upgrade by passing the "Intermediate" written exam. The Advanced Class would only have to pass the Expert written test to upgrade. Even though current Advanced Class amateurs would become "Intermediate", they would retain all current Advanced privileges until they passed the Expert written exam.

We had several readers say that they thought the classes should be called "A", "B" and "C" - instead of Expert, Intermediate and Basic. And there is merit to that idea! For one thing, it would eliminate the "class distinction" and each level would more or less stand on its own. Predictably, the biggest reaction came at the suggestion of only having two telegraphy speeds, 5 and 13 instead of three (5, 13 and 20 words-per-minute.) People that had already passed 20 wpm, thought that everyone else should have to also!

Favoring restructuring

We read every response received and then categorized it into one of four classifications. Those for simplification -- with and without arguments and those opposed -- again with and without arguments.

We found the greater majority of the more than a thousand responses in favor of some sort of Amateur Service license class restructuring.

We then attempted to establish all of the arguments for and against a change in the current six ham license levels. The following is a representative of the responses favoring reducing the number of license classes from six to three.

"We need to address the license structure to the needs of the persons interested in the hobby. If we get some individuals interested in radio at an early age they may go on and study electronics and become experts. ...Let's leave it to the acadamiens to provide the environment for developing the electronic experts." W8FLX (Age 71, licensed 54 years.)

"What we have today is a hodge-podge of several decades of changes. Five words-per-minute is adequate for the majority of operation on our HF frequencies. ...I wonder how much of the higher speed CW we hear is actually computer assisted..." N4UOW

"The FCC and ARRL really goofed when they moved from the simple license procedures of the '30's with the 10 wpm CW requirements. Instead of making an 'Elite' Club, we should have encouraged the young people to join in the amateur activity. Now in the '90's', we are finally moving (we are not there yet) in the right direction. We need new blood and lots of it to use and expand our frequencies. This will allow the individual amateur to grow in the direction which satisfies his interests and expand our hobby in new directions." WB6NFO

"The purpose and use of CW has waned. Technology has progressed. Let the service show it. If all those 'Old Coots' bemoan the demise of the hallowed tradition of CW as a rite of passage and prophesy the waxing of 'CB mentality', why are the most talked about 'Bad Boys' on HF and not on VHF?" KA3ECQ

"Incentive licensing has been a dismal failure. It has... (1) Created class warfare based on CW ability, (2) Overburdened the FCC and added to their work load... (3) Propagated a false sense of technical expertise and... (4) Created an unbelievable nightmare of sub-band within sub-bands. People need to understand the current state and value of CW. If 'CW can get through when no other mode can!'...then why is it never used during national disasters? Higher speed error correcting modes have taken over... Our code requirements are used to keep people out! Out of ham radio and off of someone's special frequencies." KD9HT (Age 46, licensed 27 years)

"The main concept should be making upgrading relevant to the technology of today rather than nostalgia for what existed 50 years ago. Five wpm code skill is adequate for operation on today's HF bands which are dominated by voice and digital modes. Individuals who choose to operate more CW than the average will naturally acquire higher code speeds by consistent use of the mode. ...computerized CW makes the issue a moot point anyway." WB4WNV

"Sooner or later we must all face the fact that high speed code proficiency is of little importance

in today's world. It seems more logical that time spent studying for an upgrade should be devoted mainly to theory and technical understanding rather than overcoming some unnecessary 'hump' in Morse code speed." KI4LZ

"Only amateurs whose minds are fossilized are against any kind of change. I believe that CW should be replaced by proficiency examinations where aspiring amateurs would have to demonstrate, in a practical way, the proper and safe use of today's electronic tools." N2GKI

"I am a well-educated American citizen who works for the government in the telecommunications field. Why should I be held to the assumption that I will only be a good operator if I learn the Morse code? How many Advanced or Extra Class licensed individuals out there can honestly say they can repair the latest Yaesu FT890? How many are computer literate?" KD4KHX

"Change is inevitable in the amateur radio community. The new no-code techs are going to want more privileges and if their ranks keep increasing at present rates, they will soon have the clout (i.e. numbers) to get what they want. The recent growth in numbers in our hobby is good. But we need to prepare for the changes it will bring..." KJ6GR

"Our present system is cumbersome to administer, difficult to explain to someone asking about getting into the hobby, and offers unnecessary barriers to getting into the upper level classes. These should not be without some demands, but at present the demands really do not fit the uses that are made of the frequencies." KB9YY

"Finally a voice of reason! ...other good reasons for simplifying our licensing structure include the following

- (1) bringing U.S. licensing in line with Canada, Europe and the rest of the world,
- (2) recognition that the imposed requirements for proficiency in Morse code are obsolete,
- (3) recognition of the changing spectrum of individuals who are attracted to Amateur Radio and;
- (4) recognition that the present incentive licensing frequency allocations are unenforceable which renders the concept of incentive licensing totally meaningless.

The Amateur Radio examination questions should be modified to deemphasize technical issues and place heavier weight on proper operating procedures and regulatory issues. Lets face it; very few of our members homebrew anything anymore and formulas for calculating wavelength can easily be looked up in any technical book.

On the other hand, it is essential that all HF operators know what frequency allocations are legal for the U.S.; what constitutes legal third party traffic and other related issues ...including obscenity. Hams on repeaters should understand what transmissions are illegal because of their business content. I believe demonstrating competence in these matters is far more important to the quality of Amateur Radio operations than demonstrating technical proficiency by drawing a Colpitts oscillator circuit schematic or something equally meaningless. My feeling is that testing should comply with international regulations. A 5 wpm code test is sufficient.

For those of use who would argue that simplifying our licensing structure would dilute the 'purity' of Amateur Radio or alternatively, feel that '...if I suffered through this, why shouldn't the next guy', let me suggest you listen to the HF bands and the bad operating practices, deliberate interference and obscene language used by our 'mainstream' brethren. Remember, these are not fresh No-Code Technicians." K2ONP (a CW operator licensed 37 years)

"Please pursue this idea with all vigor, overcome all the complainers who forever whine 'we had

to do it, you should, too!' and simplify this administrative nightmare which long ago left me in a daze in the sense that I don't even bother any more trying to remember which class operates where and how. This is a blatantly silly and ridiculous situation, no matter what 'they' say." WA6PGA

"Novice, Tech and General class hams overwhelmingly agree with streamlining. Advanced, and especially the Extra, reject it with extreme prejudice. The Advanced Class should be the top class. Anything beyond that is exactly what it is titled, 'Extra' ...and unnecessary."

"Why must we require knowledge and skill only in what some would characterize as the slowest and most error-prone method of communication. I doubt that some of the 'old timers' would want to sit for a proficiency test on packet commands... Let's face it. License tests have never kept the jerks out of law, medicine ...or radio. And no one has ever shown that knowledge of Morse code is any measure of good taste and character. In our interest as amateurs, we must encourage the maximum usage of our frequencies (and) continue to reform a license structure that appears to have no real foundation in present technology." N3LHY

"It took me 40 years to get my Extra and I get a lot of satisfaction out of the achievement. Amateur radio today is a collection of many varied specialties and I think they are all very vital and important. ...admittedly CW is fast becoming an archaic phase of our hobby and I think as time goes by, it should be de-emphasized in advancement requirements. Maybe computer expertise, or some other phase of the hobby that is more relevant to all phases of the hobby should be the governing criteria in determining eligibility for higher grade licenses." WA4FTM

"CW is like driving a stick shift car in a world of automatic transmissions. Who needs a code key when my computer can send and receive perfect code? The rules and testing requirements are geared toward practices that were valid 50 years ago." N2LDU

"I think your proposal is a quite sound approach to simplifying the licensing structure and its adoption would make it easier for applicants to advance through the classes of licenses and it would ease the workload of VEs, VECs and the FCC. Morse code is being superseded by efficient digital means of communications. Why continue to cram code speeds beyond the international requirement down the amateurs' throats when it is an optional mode of operation..." W4IGW

"CW is obsolete. The maritime industry will abandon the code within five years in favor of the IMARSAT system. There will be no more heroic operators pounding out that SOS while the ship goes down. Someone will push a button and the nearest coastal station will instantly have all the particulars via satellite including the exact position. We need a change. We must streamline and update amateur licensing." KB7QQO

"After 29 years as an active ham, I still cannot pass the 13 wpm code test. I have more knowledge than most other operators and have always operated courteously. That's more than I can say for some of the appliance operators I've heard on 20 meters. I have forgotten more about amateur radio than some of the new Advanced and Extra Class license holders I know!" N4MMI

Those opposed to restructuring

The following points were made by those individuals who opposed any form of Amateur Service license class simplification.

"The present day General Class licensee may lose his sanity because of the influx of "Intermediate" operators in the General portion of the bands..." AB5DY

"I do support the continuance of honoring hams who have reached milestones -- but those milestones need to be ever-increasing in difficulty." N8MCF

"It is very important to keep the standards of entry into ham radio high. We already have the CB band and we don't need any more." W2HLI

"The Morse code requirement is there because CW is the most reliable form of communications that we currently use. In emergency situations, CW is clearer than voice communications especially when stressful situations are encountered. Any reduction of license class requirements would lead to the Amateur Service becoming like the CB 11-meter system." N2QHF

"I like the tough requirements to get to the top and I want the system to remain the same. If the requirements for me to become a doctor are too hard, should the medical association lower them?" N2OHT (Extra)

"I was licensed a good while before incentive licensing went into effect, but I'll freely admit that policy prodded me into learning more electronic theory and code so as to qualify me for the higher classes of license and their concomitant privileges. I am a better ham because of it." W4YZT

"Why try to fix something that isn't broken? The code did not come easy for me, but I learned the language. The lazy no-code amateurs cry the code is too hard. Why don't they put forth the same effort they put into complaining into learning... The majority of the people that will respond to you will be the ones that want something for nothing..." WT3W

"I have not owned a microphone in over 20 years, nor am I interested in computer oriented communications as a hobby - its just too much like my work. I operate CW exclusively. From a technical or operating perspective there is no defensible argument for requiring CW ability to permit hams to use HF phone or computer oriented communications. But from a human perspective, however, I do believe a (restructuring) move such as this will bring us closer to a CB mentality. I'm often embarrassed to hear some hams on the SSB bands now. It will only get worse." K3WA

"My Dad is an Advanced and is about to upgrade to Extra. You will take away his satisfaction of upgrading. The harder you work for something, the more you appreciate it, is what my Dad has always told me." (Unsigned)

"To combine my operating privileges and other 'perks' with any lower class license would be an insult. We as Extra Class licensees have worked hard and deserve the proper level of respect that goes with the license." AC4GM

"The problem with the people of today is that they want things the easy way. They want things given to them. People don't respect things that they have been given! The more sweat they put into something the more worthwhile it is!" KB9KC "Extra and proud of it!"

"My age is 34 and I am celebrating my 20th year of Amateur Radio. The licensing structure does not require simplification. Any easing of requirements will cheapen the high standards that we

all should be aspiring to. Nothing will ever lessen my pride in teaching myself the necessary electronics using only an ARRL license manual and handbook. Somewhere along the way, America has combined quality with quantity." ND1H

"The 20 wpm code requirement has little to do with communications ...it has to do with commitment. The study guides publish all the questions and answers. There can be no surprises on the tests. Code is different. It requires a definite commitment on the part of the amateur ...to pass the 20 wpm code test there is no easy way. You are going to have to work for it." N6ZAE

"I believe that this country has become lost in a spiral of greed, lust and lack of respect for anything which requires a true effort to attain. My main concern is the well being of ham radio. Today when I have visitors to my home ...I cringe when I turn on the rig to demonstrate it in fear of hearing the indecencies that have become all too commonplace." KF4R

"As it stands now, we are only one step away from giving away licenses much the same way as the FCC did with the CB licenses. Streamlining yes. Requiring less knowledge, no way! The idea of streamlining is not unlike a mine field. If we make it across, fine, but one wrong step and we lose everything!" WA4NUZ

"Do you really believe that those who are unwilling to put forth the effort to earn the privilege to operate are going to help Amateur Radio progress, and along the way set new standards of operating excellence? As for the written exams, I can't think of any other exams I have even taken in my life where I had a copy of all the possible questions and answers before I took the test. Just how much easier does it need to be?" AA5ZT

"The CW requirement is not the issue here, nor is the cumbersome licensing structure a problem. More at the heart of the issue is a small nucleus of hams who would want all of the benefits of incentive licensing with none of the effort associated with them. Amateur Radio has more immediate problems that need to be addressed; conduct on the bands, abusive and obnoxious language, net jamming and out-of-band operation to name a few." NT1I

"Why is it so difficult to see that this continuing effort to reduce the amateur licensing standards is going to result in a decline in the quality of the amateur service? Amateur radio is a hobby ...but a specialized hobby. It was not intended to be a personal communications service. We have cellular phones and CB for that." N2PD

"To me, code is a tradition as well as an absolute necessity ...like a fraternal secret handshake that has bound its members together over the years. Most institutions fail when traditions fall by the wayside. Code is also the simplest form of communications in times of emergency when all else ails." WB6ORJ

"I had to earn my privileges. I don't want them watered down or given away." WA8RZR

"The written tests are already too easy, all you need is a Q&A study guide and a good memory. The code tests are not an unreasonable requirement and may well be the only thing that is keeping the HF bands from turning into a giant CB arena." WB4GEC

"The truth of the matter is that because of the diversity of amateur radio interests, there is no

standard of performance that will perfectly fit all... But competence in Morse code comes closer than any other, since it is the foundation of all of the emerging digital forms of communication. What a graduated series of licenses does do is separate those with drive, ambition and persistence in achievement - with a desire to reach the top and to meet the requirements -- from the common herd. To the 'cry babies' who want no-code licensing with no sub-band restrictions, I say: take up finger painting. No license, easy to learn, great potential for admiration, a means of communication perfectly fitted to your ambition and/or your IQ ...and an unlimited spectrum on every wall and fence in the country!" KJ9N

"The name of the game is to sell amateur equipment and load ham magazines with advertisements. It is grown into a big business. Lowering standards is not the way to go. We should have learned this from our school systems by now." K4PTU

So there you have it

Restructuring the Amateur Service from six classes to three, pro and con! It has been an interesting straw poll -- one with unbelievably strong feelings on both sides. To summarize, those readers in favor of simplifying and restructuring the Amateur Service contend:

- (1.) the current Amateur Service licensing requirements do not reflect current technology, needed knowledge or planned operation,
- (2.) incentive licensing has created an unnecessary aristocracy,
- (3.) and a very complex tangle of licensing requirements, license classes, frequency sub-bands and privileges,
- (4.) Morse code is becoming archaic and manual telegraphy knowledge should not be the primary method used in determining Amateur privileges,
- (5.) high speed Morse code should not be required for phone operation,
- (6.) Morse code proficiency is not related to operator knowledge, quality and desirability and serves as an unnecessary barrier to higher license class operation,
- (7.) two telegraphy speeds, rather than three, would more closely align our licensing requirements with those of the rest of the world,
- (8.) Morse code is never used during emergencies only as a hobby art form,
- (9.) the workload associated with administering six Amateur classes is excessive, especially when two or three classes will suffice,
- (10.) Simplification will facilitate entry into Amateur radio of more newcomers, especially youngsters some of whom may go on to technical careers.
- (11.) It will increase the number of ham operators and could protect our spectrum from reallocation.

On the other hand, those opposed to any form of restructuring maintain that

- (1.) any simplification of the Amateur Service will be accompanied by an increase in ham band congestion,
- (2.) it is not appropriate to reduce Amateur Service licensing standards,
- (3.) most people want something for nothing,
- (4.) everyone should be compelled to complete the same difficult examinations that was required of me,
- (5.) a graduated licensing system motivates Amateurs to improve their knowledge,
- (6.) simplification could lead to an influx of undesirable operators,
- (7.) a reduction to three classes is comparable to diluting or giving away the privileges I had to

earn

- (8.) Morse code proficiency is a ham radio tradition which should not be diminished,
- (9.) a difficult licensing scheme is important to recruit quality operators,
- (10.) ham band restructuring will contribute to another chaotic CB situation,
- (11.) the 20 words-per-minute code speed should remain as a milestone for Amateurs to conquer and;
- (12.) those in favor of lowering standards do so for business reasons so they can sell more amateur related products.

Petition filed with FCC

A Petition for Rule Making seeking restructuring with a different twist was filed with the FCC last year by Ohio amateur, William C. Wells, WA8HSU. He wants the Commission to reduce the Amateur license classes to just Novice, Technician and General. While we don't plan to file to petition with the FCC on the matter, it certainly appears that the licensing structure can and should be simplified.

It also appears that the Novice and Technician license classes will be moving closer together shortly. Acting on a couple of other petitions, the FCC has recently proposed to allow Novices expanded frequency VHF privileges at 222 MHz and to be repeater control operators. There doesn't seem to be enough distinction to warrant the continued expenditure of FCC and VEC resources to maintain two license classes and what amounts to a third class, the Technician Plus.

By the simple expedient of transferring the 5 wpm telegraphy requirement to the "Intermediate" Class, the Novice and Technician Class licenses could easily be merged.

Instead of regarding the respective license classes as a progression of privileges to which every licensee should aspire, the view should be that each class offers a particular array of privileges, which are useful in their own right.

In other words, as a practical matter, individual licensees choose and qualify for the license that matches their interests and the licensing structure should reflect that fact. The arrangements of licenses in a hierarchy is outmoded and needlessly consumes resources to perpetuate it. The time has come for a re-thinking of the nature of license classes.